The Proctor article begins with an analysis of experiments conducted just around the corner of Duke University. In 1953, a paper company responsible for the production of rolling papers conducted a study apparently proving to tobacco companies that cigarettes themselves, and not the pesticides on the plants, cause cancer.

The debate, in recent years, has come to examine the actions of cigarette companies through the decades; did they take the research seriously and interpret it appropriately? The challenge, in this regard, is determining the extent to which research must be proven to be taken seriously. However, it stands that, despite the claims of the seven major tobacco companies to the contrary in 1994, there was significant (“private”) evidence that cigarettes were both addictive and carcinogenic.

Historical evidence indicates that the link between cigarette smoke and cancer was first hypothesized in 1898, but evidence rapidly started mounting in the 1920s and 1920s. In fact, it is even accepted that the possibility has been discussed by tobacco companies since the 1940s, despite their 1990s denials. There is a significant amount of philosophical debate about when evidence becomes “incontrovertible,” but the verdict is that when the scientific community reaches a consensus, it is the responsibility of the company to accept and accurately portray this analysis.

This is the point at which I begin to question the conclusions of this article. While I agree that on the most basic, moral level, the protection of the consumers of their product is basic human decency, the executives of a company must also conform to fiduciary responsibility; they must do what is best for their shareholders. So while getting people addicted to carcinogenic cigarettes is extremely morally questionable, it is absolutely the best thing that tobacco executives can do to fulfill their fiduciary responsibility. The question then becomes, how should they proceed to balance their moral obligations with their legal and financial obligations? I have no idea.

The Hanson article (which is really hard to find on the website based on how it is labeled in the syllabus), begins with staggering statistics on the negative effects of tobacco use and addiction. To me, the majority of these bulleted statistics were actually quite surprising. However, I found the observation that 3800 “young people” begin smoking in the United States every day less than satisfying due to the lack of definition of young people.

This textbook chapter went on to describe an astounding quantity of statistics to characterize cigarette smoking and addiction. Statistics including the frequency of cigarette and tobacco smoking (and smokeless tobacco usage), and the medical costs relating to tobacco usage were used to deter readers from the consideration of smoking.

The history of tobacco use was also discussed in great detail, especially as it pertains (quite naturally) to the Americas. Finally, the article progressed into the drug effects of tobacco and especially nicotine, which I thought tied together nicely the beginning revolving around statistics about tobacco usage. The parts about the article that I found the most interesting were those that pertained to light cigarettes and smokeless tobacco because they revealed to me the hazards that lie in the more socially accepted (and supposedly safer) methods of smoking.